

Testimony of Craig Root on Behalf of the Alliance for Spaceport and Coastal Economic Development

Good morning Mr. Chairman, my name is Craig Root. I am a former Camden County administrator, a local small business owner and a property owner on Little Cumberland Island. I have worked and lived here for the past 38 years. I am also one of the founders of the Alliance for Spaceport and Coastal Economic Development. I am here to testify today about the economic development opportunities Spaceport Camden presents for our community. However, I am not an aerospace engineer so I will leave any testimony surrounding the physics of rocket launches and the safety protocols to the experts.

There are just two spaceports on the East Coast of the United States capable of vertical launches into equatorial orbits: Cape Canaveral in Florida and Wallops Island in Virginia. Both of these spaceports are federal ranges, meaning commercial space companies must coordinate their activities with the government. Launches at Cape Canaveral, for example, are subject to coordination with Patrick Air Force Base. Coordinating highly complex private launch vehicle operations with multiple government agencies, particularly national defense agencies, can be extremely difficult.

This is where Spaceport Camden is truly unique. Spaceport Camden will be the only non-federal commercial spaceport on the East Coast. Coupled with the vertical launch and landing capabilities, southern latitude, temperate climate, deep water port access, railroad infrastructure and major highways, Camden County is the ideal location for a spaceport. This isn't just hyperbole or my personal opinion, every aerospace expert that testified before this Committee in Atlanta made this observation.

As a business owner, I can testify without hesitation that investment in a location without government red tape is always preferable to running a bureaucratic and regulatory gauntlet. With all other factors being equal, as they are with Spaceport Camden, the decision to choose Camden County over Cape Canaveral or Wallops Island makes common business sense.

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Recently there has been a great deal of discussion about the county's expenditures to pursue a spaceport in Camden County. As a former Camden County administrator and long term County resident, I know that economic development is one of the County Commission's primary objectives. The Commissioners and County Administrator are harnessing Camden's unique location on Georgia's coast to tap into a rapidly expanding marketplace. This innovative, proactive approach is the sort of out-of-the box thinking that drives Georgia's growth and makes Georgia one of the best states in the nation to do business. I personally believe this effort and associated investment to be the best possible use of county taxpayer resources for economic development.

Of course, Spaceport Camden is not just a local project. Its benefits will extend far beyond the county's borders. Building a Spaceport here requires involvement from the Georgia Department of Economic Development, the Office of the Governor and of course, the State Georgia Legislature. Georgia is blessed to have the largest and most respected aerospace engineering program in the United States at Georgia Tech. Achieving that level of distinction requires significant investment by the taxpayers. Annually, we pay more than \$12 million in tax dollars to educate the next generation of rocket scientists at Georgia Tech. Yet the committee heard testimony last month that Georgia only garners ½ of 1% of the US space market and just 1/10 of 1% of the global space market. Today, we are spending Georgia tax payer dollars to provide a premiere education to students who are being forced to leave Georgia for job opportunities in states like Florida, Virginia and California. A spaceport in Georgia will change that dynamic and stop this brain drain to other states.

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Finally, I want to testify before you today as a Little Cumberland Island property owner. There is ~~little~~ no question that Little Cumberland Island is a special and majestic place that deserves protection. But it is also important to recognize that a small group of part-time residents should not dictate the full-time economic future of Camden County or the State of Georgia. All land owners on Little Cumberland Island are part-time residents and less than one half of the 100 individual lots on the island have vacation cottages. This is a very sparsely populated island with visitation ranging from just a few people to around 100 during peak holiday periods. Even at full capacity, Spaceport Camden only anticipates twelve launches per year. The inconvenience to Little Cumberland Island property owners for access would only be a few hours per month. It is hard for me to understand how this small inconvenience should take precedence over the economic welfare of Camden County and its citizens.

As a Little Cumberland Island property owner, I am not concerned about rocket launches. I am confident in the FAA's expertise in this area. The FAA has licensed more than 300 launches and reentries without a single public safety impact. I am far more concerned about property damage from natural disasters than the possible impact of spaceport activities. My fellow property owners and I consider fire a dangerous ongoing threat as there is no fire protection on the Island. I believe the homeowners association would best serve its members by working with Camden County, as part of Spaceport Camden risk mitigation efforts, to put in place full time fire protection for the Island.

I'd like to thank the Committee for traveling to Camden County and for allowing me to testify today. The Alliance for Spaceport and Coastal Economic Development looks forward to working with the Georgia legislature, Camden County and the Federal Aviation Administration to bring high paying jobs to coastal Georgia.